



Minorities decry cuts to Montgomery health programs

By: [Alan Suderman](#)
Examiner Staff Writer
April 9, 2010

Minority groups in Montgomery County are protesting proposed cuts to health care programs, saying the cuts unfairly target those who have been historically shut out of receiving quality care.

County Executive Ike Leggett is looking to cut a hotline referral and translation program for Hispanic and Asian residents, and funding for black HIV prevention efforts, as well as other minority-based health programs, by about 11 percent.

"Slashing programs that save the lives of people of color is a stark counterstatement to the manner in which Montgomery County lauds its diversity as an economic driver for the county," said Gustavo Torres, executive director of CASA of Maryland. "What message should potential investors understand about how the county values its diversity?"

CASA, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People of Montgomery County and the Asian American Health Initiative held a joint rally in front of the County Council building to protest Leggett's proposed cuts. One of the signs in the crowd read: "Budget cuts destroy minorities."

Advocates said traditional disparities in health care among minorities -- including higher infant mortality and HIV rates -- point to the strong need for the translation and patient navigator programs that help foreign-language speakers overcome language and cultural barriers.

Leggett spokesman Patrick Lacefield said the county has little choice but to cut a number of popular programs to bridge an \$800 million budget gap. He said the county also is trying to consolidate minority health services and eliminate redundant programs.

"Hard choices have had to be made," Lacefield said. "However, the county will continue to provide access to health services for the range of diverse communities and needs, albeit in a different way."

Brad Botwin, president of the anti-illegal-immigration group Help Save Maryland, said the county offers plenty of health care services to all residents, regardless of color, and having ethnic-specific programs is costly and redundant.

"It's just a waste of money," Botwin said.

asuderman@washingtonexaminer.com